

An Inconvenient Question

Socialism and the Environment



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Introduction

In recent years the environment has become a major political issue. And rightly so, because a serious environmental crisis really does exist. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat have all become contaminated to a greater or lesser extent. Ecology – the branch of biology that studies the relationships of living organisms to their environment – is important, as it is concerned with explaining exactly what has been happening and what is likely to happen if present trends continue.

Since the publication of our Ecology and Socialism pamphlet of 1990 environmental problems facing the planet have got much worse. We said then that attempts to solve those problems within capitalism would meet with failure, and that is precisely what has happened. Recent research on increasing environmental degradation has painted an alarming picture of the likely future if the profit system continues to hold sway. Voices claiming that the proper use of market forces will solve the problem can still be heard, but as time goes on the emerging facts of what is happening serve only to contradict those voices.

In this pamphlet we start with a brief review of the development of Earth and of humankind's progress on it so far. We then examine the mounting evidence that the planet is now under threat of a worsening, dangerous environment for human and other forms of life. The motor of capitalism is money profit for the minority capitalist class to add to their capital, or capital accumulation. Environmental concerns, if considered at all, always come a poor second. The waste of human and other resources used in the market system is prodigious, adding to the problems and standing in the way of their solution.

Earth Summits over the last few decades show a consistent record of failure – unjustifiably high hopes and pitifully poor results sum them up. The Green Party and other environmental bodies propose reforms of capitalism that haven't worked or have made very little real difference in the past. Socialists can see no reason why it should be any different in the future. Finally we discuss the need, with respect to the ecology of the planet, for a revolution that is both based on socialist principles of common ownership and production solely for needs, and environmental principles of conserving – not destroying – the wealth and amenities of the planet.

1. What is ecology?

The coining of the term ecology is generally attributed to the biologist Haeckel. He used it in 1886 to describe the study of the relationships of living organisms to each other and to their environment. Darwin, in *The Origin of Species*, had written of a study of the place of organisms in what he called the economy of nature. He revealed 'how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life.'

Ecology teaches that the mineral and chemical constituents of natural matter are continually being used and transformed by the activities of living organisms. Under natural conditions these materials get transformed back into what they originally were, so that the whole process can begin again. Ecology is concerned that materials should be extracted, transformed, consumed and decomposed in such a way as not to upset the balanced functioning of the biosphere. The biosphere includes the hydrosphere, Earth's crust and atmosphere. In fact so interrelated and interdependent on each other are all life-forms that it might even be said that the biosphere itself is a single living organism.

The biosphere is in reality one big ecosystem. A simple example of an ecosystem would be a field, forest, pond, or even a puddle. In a pond, for instance, the sediment lying at the bottom contains nutrients which support various kinds of plant life. These plants provide food which sustain the fish and insects living in the pond. When plants and animals die their bodies decompose, releasing nutrients back into the sediment in what is, in effect a continuous process of recycling. All ecosystems tend towards a state of harmony or balance through a system of self-regulation. However, such ecosystems are not 'closed' or entirely self-sustaining; each interacts with other ecosystems.

A brief history of Earth

In 1658 Archbishop Ussher stated that the Earth had been formed in 4004 BCE, derived from calculations based on Biblical genealogy. Today most scientific experts put the time period at 4-5 billion years. At first Earth was a molten mass of rock and metals. As it cooled it formed a thin crust which floated on a sea of molten rock. Millions of years passed while an atmosphere gradually formed. The crust cooled into one large chunk, forming oceans, seas, lakes and rivers.

The atmosphere before life appeared on earth is believed to have been composed mainly of hydrogen and its compounds methane, ammonia and water vapour. Life – essentially a chemical process – began to form. Once the chemical process of growth and reproduction we call life had been set in motion it never stopped. Over a period of hundreds of millions of years it spread from the seas to colonise the whole surface of the globe with a great variety of life-forms – bacterial, plant and animal.

Life on Earth is sustained by the sun's rays, which are converted by plants, through the process of photosynthesis, into a form of chemical energy. All other life-forms depend on this as food to live. Insects and other animals eat parts of the plant – its leaves, its roots, its fruit and seeds – and are in turn eaten by other animals. Their droppings and their bodies when they die are decomposed by other insects, bacteria and fungi. These bacteria and fungi release into the soil the various minerals which plants must have to exist and grow. So the circuit is completed; all life-forms ultimately depend on each other in order to live.

Humans enter the scene

Earlier types of Homo evolved into Homo sapiens not just in response to externally-produced changes in their environment but also in response to changes they themselves made when they intervened in nature to meet their needs. It is through the interaction of a number of factors – upright stance, free hands, opposable thumbs, tool using, tool making, collective hunting, speech, language, learning – that our ape-like ancestors are most likely to have evolved by a process of natural selection into human beings.

Humans actively intervene to change nature to satisfy their needs. All life-forms change nature simply by being alive and breathing and consuming food. But human activity involves not simply taking from nature in the process of satisfying needs but also changing nature to get it to provide for those needs. Indeed, changing nature to provide for human needs is the basic definition of production.

What humans do when they engage in productive activity is to apply their mental and physical energies to materials that originally came from nature with a view to changing their form so as to make them suitable for human use. Since humans are part of nature, what happens from an ecological point of view is that one part of nature acts on another part to change its form. This means that human work or labour is not the sole source of wealth. Useful things, or use-values as they are sometimes called, are combinations of two elements, labour and the materials provided by nature.

Things can go wrong when, for whatever reason, humans ignore the ecological consequences of their actions. Ecological damage inflicted by human action is not new to history. The rise and fall of civilizations can be, to some extent, attributed to environmental factors. Once-fertile lands have become deserts through over-usage. Among the causes of the collapse of Mayan civilisation was the considerable deforestation and soil erosion.

2. Earth under threat

More damage has been done to the natural environment by human action during the last hundred years than in any previous period in recorded history. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat have all been contaminated and polluted to a greater or lesser extent. The list of problems is long and growing, including global warming (associated with greenhouse gas emissions and climate change), air and water pollution, depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, deforestation, desertification, loss of species and biodiversity, over-fishing, the hunting of certain animals to extinction, the disposal of nuclear and other waste, and the consequences of population growth. These are not separate problems – they are more or less cumulative and mutually influential.

First we review the types and extent of environmental damage that has already been caused by human action. Then the various forecasts and estimates of future damage and problems are examined. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how far the claims of the sceptical environmentalists are justified. Consideration of the question of the precedence of the profit motive over longer-term environmental concerns is deferred to the next chapter.

The literature referred to here is only a selection from an ever-growing mass of relevant publications. Dozens of books dealing fairly comprehensively with current environmental problems have been published. Hundreds of books, articles, government and non-government organisation reports and electronic communications are available. There are thousands of publications dealing only with particular problems in restricted parts of the world and with sub-fields such as environmental ethics and ecofeminism.

The damage so far

We may start with three works, all published in 2006. Certainly the best known, but not necessarily the best, is *An Inconvenient Truth*, by former US Vice President Al Gore. It is in book and video form. The book contains much worrying research on the already evident catastrophic effects of global warming. The video tells a visually and aurally impressive story of global environmental degradation. Some of the points Gore makes in the book are:

- ‘We have grown so numerous and our technologies have become so powerful that we are now capable of having a significant influence on many parts of the Earth’s environment. The more vulnerable part of the Earth’s ecological system is the atmosphere. It’s vulnerable because it’s so thin.’ (p. 22).
- ‘Almost all of the mountain glaciers in the world are now melting, many of them quite rapidly.’ (p. 48).
- ‘Here’s where CO₂ is now [about 370 parts per million] – way above anything measured in the prior 650,000 year record.’ (p. 67).
- In 2005 ‘... a major study from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] supported the scientific consensus that global warming is making hurricanes more powerful and more destructive.’ (p. 92).

The author and journalist George Monbiot is also quite well known internationally as a campaigning environmentalist. In the introduction to his book *Heat: How to Stop the Planet Burning*, he shows more interest in doom than bloom: ‘We inhabit the brief historical interlude between ecological constraint and ecological catastrophe.’ A good deal of his book is about how

green individuals should try to help by turning out the lights, stop filling the kettle, and give up driving short distances. But he does quote much global warming research, complementing Gore's:

- 'According to the World Meteorological Organization, the increase in temperature in the twentieth century is likely to have been the largest in any century during the past 1000 years.' (p. 4).
- 'Already sea ice in the Arctic has shrunk to the smallest area ever recorded. In the Antarctic, scientists watched stupefied in 2002 as the Larsen B ice shelf collapsed into the sea.' (p. 5).

Patrick Hossay's book, *Unsustainable*, is concerned with global warming issues but also deals more generally with a wide range of environmental problems: 'The destruction of the Earth's ozone layer, the acidification of our rain, the poisoning of our rivers, lakes and oceans, the depletion of our soil, the devastation of our forests, and large-scale extinctions intensify one another, creating a multi-pronged and devastating attack on the Earth's capacity to support human life'. (p. 1).

Pollution and waste are two of the topics to which Hossay draws attention: 'Every year roughly 20 million barrels of oil enter the Earth's oceans from land runoff or spills, devastating local sea life... Americans throw away 2.5 million plastic bottles every hour – only about 2 per cent are recycled.' (p. 31).

Fears for the future

It is one thing to focus attention, as we have done above, on the damage that human activity has already caused to the environment. It is another, but related, thing to forecast the future; to consider what is likely to happen if present trends continue. The possibility and expected success of remedial action also comes into the picture.

Scientists who report on and assess what has happened up to the present time often go on to make predictions about what is likely to happen in the future. So far as the global environment is concerned, these predictions are, to say the least, generally not optimistic. Here are three from George Monbiot:

... a rise of just 2.1°C [in global temperature] will expose between 2.3 and 3 billion to the risk of water shortages. The disappearance of glaciers in the Andes and the Himalayas will imperil the people who depend on their meltwater, particularly in Pakistan, Western China, Central Asia, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. As rainfall decreases, there are likely to be longer and more frequent droughts in southern Africa, Australia and the countries surrounding the Mediterranean...

If the Earth warms by a moderate amount and sea levels increase by some 40cm (roughly in the middle of the expected range for this century), the number of people in danger from saltwater floods caused by storm surges could grow from some 75 million (today) to around 200 million. As the sea rises, salt water will pollute the drinking water on which some of the biggest coastal cities – Shanghai, Manila, Jakarta, Bangkok, Mumbai, Karachi, Lagos, Buenos Aires and Lima – depend... With just a small degree of warming, the interior of the Amazon Basin becomes essentially void of vegetation...

By 2030... the total capacity of the biosphere to absorb carbon will have reduced from the current 4 billion tonnes a year to 2.7 billion. To maintain equilibrium at that point... the world's population can emit no more than 2.7 billion tonnes of carbon a year in 2030. As we currently produce around 7 billion, this implies a global reduction of 60 per cent. In 2030 the world's people are likely to number around 8.2 billion. By dividing the total carbon sink (2.7 billion tonnes) by the number of people, we find that to achieve stabilization the weight of carbon

emissions per person should be no greater than 0.33 tonnes... In the rich countries this means an average cut by 2030 of around 90 per cent...

At the time Monbiot was writing the latest report of the UN International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had not been published. That report, to which several thousand of the world's climate experts contributed, was published in February 2007 and concluded:

Most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations.

The IPCC report offered six scenarios of what could happen by the year 2100. All of them assume the continuation of capitalism. Four of them can be dismissed as unrealistic in that they are incompatible with the way capitalism works.

Two of them are favoured by Greens and assume, respectively, that 'the underlying theme is self-reliance and preservation of local identities' or that 'the emphasis is on local solutions to economic, social and environmental sustainability'. Both imply a slower rate of capital accumulation than hitherto. A third scenario assumes a 'rapid change in economic structures toward a service and information economy, with reductions in material intensity and the introduction of clean and resource efficient technologies...' But this just isn't going to happen under capitalism – it would require the establishment of a world socialist system to be applied.

The fourth unrealistic scenario envisages 'a future world of very rapid economic growth, global population that peaks in mid-century and declines thereafter, and the rapid introduction of new and more efficient technologies' but where the emphasis is on non-fossil energy sources. What's unrealistic about this is the early abandoning of fossil fuels to generate energy. They are currently cheaper than the alternatives, and will continue to be used as long as this is the case.

The two remaining scenarios share the assumption of the fourth about economic growth and new technologies but assume that the emphasis will be 'fossil intensive' (the present situation) or 'a balance across all [energy] sources'. The latter seems more likely, if only because as fossil fuels become rarer their price will rise relative to non-fossil sources. The IPCC's "best estimate" for a rise, on this scenario, in global average temperature (relative to 1980-1999) by the last decade of this century is 2.8° C. A rise of this amount would cause many problems – melting ice-caps, rising sea-levels, droughts, migrations – which capitalism, because it is divided politically into competing states, will be unable to tackle rationally; in fact, in some cases they are likely to lead to wars. These problems could only be tackled successfully within the framework of a world socialist system where there would no longer be armed states or frontiers but a global administration able to take effective global action.

The sceptical environmentalists

When it comes to environmental problems and estimates of their future extent, we find varying degrees of scepticism. The first degree is absolute denial. Take global warming, for example: 'Don't believe anything they say. Ups and downs are perfectly normal. The globe hasn't got warmer, and there's no reason to suppose it will get warmer.' The second degree is mild concern about what has apparently been happening, but a blasé attitude to consequences for the future. This has been called the technology-fix perspective (any future problems will be solved by knowledge and technology). Thirdly there is the view that, yes, there are problems, but spending resources on solving them would be more costly than doing little or nothing.

There is some competition among supporters of capitalism to see who can make the most stupidly head-in-the-sand statement about the environment. Wallace Kaufman is a strong contender: 'Global warming exists only in theory and in the realm of quite limited computer models' (No Turning Back, 1994, p.74). Ronald Bailey weighs in with 'The Global Climate Change Treaty's call for a massive and costly shift in the world's economy from fossil fuels is based in part on the belief that the world's average temperature has increased significantly in recent years. It has not' (The True State of the Planet, 1995, p. 3). Kaufman and Bailey are not alone in this kind of scepticism. As we shall see in the next chapter, there is a strong motivation for supporters of the profit system to play down its adverse effects on the environment.

In 2001 a sceptical environmentalist devoted a whole book with this title to explaining why he is one is Bjørn Lomborg. He is an economist, and more recently (2004) has edited a book which includes the views of selected economists on the costs and benefits of expenditure on dealing with environmental problems. Those economists were asked what would be the best ways of advancing global welfare supposing that an additional \$50 billion of resources were at governments' disposal. Expenditure on the environment was one of ten options.

Not for nothing is economics called the dismal science. Judging by the sceptical environmentalists quoted by Lomborg, it should also be known as the pro-capitalism, anti-environmentalism and short-term science:

- * 'The environment is considered to be important, but it is not yet time to do anything massive about climate change.' (p. 613).
- * '... the climate change opportunities I rank as "bad projects"...most of the benefits are far into the future and the substantial costs are upfront and immediate.' (p. 624)
- * 'Future generations will be much richer than current ones, and it thus makes no sense to make current generations pay for the problems of future generations.' (p. 627).
- * 'Although the ultimate dangers may turn out to prompt action, the current evidence indicates that it is much too soon to act relative to the many other important and pressing opportunities that demand immediate attention.' (p. 635).
- * 'There is evidence that global warming is real and that eventually it will become an important problem... recommend...a modest tax for the short run.' (p. 642).

In the following pages we look at some of the implications of these views and discuss how capitalism itself is the cause of environmental damage.

3 Profit wins, the environment also ran

Environmental concerns are expressed not only by critics of capitalism but also by its supporters. ‘Something must be done’, they say – but that something never includes getting rid of the system that causes the problems. We first look at the various ways in which corporations attack environmentalism, then at capitalist accounting (firms passing on environmental costs to others), and finally at the so-called tragedy of the commons – that is, what is claimed happens when there is commonly-held property.

The corporate attack on environmentalism

One response to evidence that profit-seeking activity damages the environment is not to deny the claim but to imply that such damage is the unavoidable price of success. Consider this by self-styled “conservative” environmentalist Peter Huber : ‘Hyper-successful species that they are, capitalists pollute, despoil, and dump a great quantity of effluents on their surroundings’ (Hard Green, 1999, p.180). Actually Huber over-personalises how the system works. Very few capitalists pollute, despoil and dump. They pay much more numerous workers to do those things for them.

Sharon Beder has researched and written on *Global Spin: the Corporate Assault on Environmentalism* (2000). Most of her examples come from the US, but some are from Canada, Britain and Australia. Here are a few of them:

- Between 1989 and 1994 Exxon has ‘been a member of the Alliance for Reasonable Regulation, and also spent over a million dollars in that same period on lobbying congressional members in its efforts to prevent the Clean Air Act being strengthened.’ (p. 24).
- ‘Perhaps the most common strategy of corporate front groups is to portray themselves as environmentalists, and the views they are promoting as those of environmentalists. In this way corporate interests appear to have environmental support. The names of groups are chosen because they sound as if they are grass-roots community and environmental groups, such as the Environmental Conservation Organisation, founded by the Land Improvement Contractors of America...’ (p. 30).
- ‘Corporations have utilized think-tanks and a few dissident scientists to cast doubt on the existence and magnitude of various environmental problems, including global warming, ozone depletion and species extinction... for example, most conservative think-tanks have argued that global warming is not happening, and that any possible future warming will be slight and may have beneficial effects...’ (p. 92).
- ‘... the international oil company Chevron spends about five times as much publicising its environmental actions as it does on the actions themselves.’ (p. 129).
- One PR firm advised Clorex Corporation ‘on how to deal with an expected anti-chlorine campaign. It recommended labelling protesters as terrorists and suing critical journalists for defamation.’ (p. 134).
- ‘In the US a frequently cited computer model of the economic costs of climate change, the International Impact Assessment Model [IIAM] was originally commissioned by the American Petroleum Institute, although this is seldom mentioned when the findings of the model are referred to. This model also predicts large costs if emissions targets have to be met, and that it would be cheaper to reduce emissions later rather than earlier. The model ignores the environmental costs of

not acting sooner and the possibility of [promoting] alternatives to fossil fuel.' (p. 244).

- 'Through pervasive advertising on television and schools, and through specially designed educational materials distributed to schools, corporations have quite consciously set about ensuring that future generations are big consumers, share corporate values and view environmental problems from a corporate point of view.' (p. 280).

Perhaps it is worth adding that, as part of corporate spokespeople seeking to present themselves as good guys, they sometimes express concern for environmental justice. But this concern is always secondary, never primary. As David Harvey shows, 'Concerns for environmental justice (if they exist at all) are kept strictly subservient to concerns for economic efficiency, continuous growth, and capital accumulation... The only serious question is how best to manage the environment for capital accumulation, economic efficiency and growth' (Justice, Nature and the Geography of Distance, 1996, p. 375).

Nuclear power has been put forward as being able to make a substantial contribution both to electricity generation and saving large amounts of CO₂ from being released into the atmosphere. There are unresolved problems here.

No satisfactory solution has yet been found to the problem of disposing of the large amount of radioactive waste that inevitably results from the process of nuclear fission. Dumping this in the sea or burying it deep in the ground is merely to pollute a part of the biosphere for generations to come.

Exposure to radiation can be fatal and can lead to cancers and deformities. Nuclear accidents can have long-lasting damaging effects on environments as well as on people. Before the Chernobyl meltdown in 1986 it was assumed that, in the event of an accident at a nuclear power plant, only a tiny percentage of the radioactive inventory of the reactor core would escape from the containment into the environment. The Chernobyl disaster proved this assumption wrong. The chances of such accidents occurring are enhanced under capitalism where the pressures to cut costs are ever present.

All that can be said at this point is that in a sane socialist world, society as a whole would be able to decide democratically whether or not to use this option. If they did decide to pursue nuclear power the same dedicated working class men and women who design, operate and inspect nuclear power stations and disposal facilities today could continue to do so in the future.

Capitalist accounting

Capitalist accounting is a matter of doing paper and electronic work that will help goods and services to be produced and sold at minimal cost and maximum benefit (profit) to capital. Giving and taking are anathema to capitalists and supporters of their system – pricing and buying and selling is the name of the game. Here's how Fred L. Smith explains how the so-called free market puts a price on the environment:

'Only under a system where resources are privately held will people have the ability to express their environmental value accurately. Only through a price system will those values be conveyed to entrepreneurs, who can in turn satisfy those values.' (in *The True State of the Planet*, ed. R. Bailey, 1995, p.390).

Note that this is what entrepreneurs can do about the environment, according to capitalist economic theory. In practice, of course, they are not in the business of satisfying anyone's values but their own, which are primarily financial. In deciding their levels of production, investment and

consumption, it is assumed by economists that individuals and firms normally consider costs and benefits to themselves, and not the impact of their decisions on society as a whole.

Economists put a price on everything they can, including human life. Monbiot draws attention, for example, to a 1996 study for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which estimated that a life lost in the poor nations could be priced at \$150,000, while a life lost in the rich nations could be assessed at \$1.5 million. Anything that cannot be quantified in money terms is simply 'externalised' – excluded from the balance sheet. This means that the loss of all the really important things – a functioning ecosystem, human communities, the quality of human life – isn't counted. The market simply fails to take any detrimental effect on them into account.

The considerable environmental and health costs associated with the nuclear industry are also 'externalised', with the nuclear industry not expected to accept any financial responsibility for them, though capitalist states were prepared to bear this burden as the nuclear industry was originally a by-product of the development of nuclear weapons.

Also, according to capitalist accounting, any paid-for activity whether or not it is harmful to humans is counted as 'production'. Which means that, in calculations of GNP, action to deal with such negative events as oil spillages, lethal waste, and toxic poisoning show up as positive contributions.

The travesty of the commons

In 1968 an American biologist Garrett Hardin invented a parable to explain why, in his view, common ownership was no solution to the environmental crisis and why in fact it would make matters worse. This was sweet music to the defenders of capitalist ownership of the means of producing wealth, and Hardin's parable was soon incorporated into the arsenal of anti-socialist arguments.

Called 'The tragedy of the commons', his parable went like this: assume a pasture to which all herdsmen have free access to graze their cattle. In these circumstances each herdsman would try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons and, in the end, its carrying capacity would be exceeded, resulting in environmental degradation.

Twenty years later, in a letter to the New Scientist (22 October 1988), Hardin modified his position a little, writing that his parable should have been called 'The tragedy of the unmanaged commons' and re-stating his thesis as 'under conditions of scarcity, where the number of players is not small, an unmanaged commons inevitably ends in ruin.' He went on to discuss possible ways of managing a commons, one of which he called 'commonism' and attributed it to Marx:

Karl Marx gave the best summary of this policy in 1875: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" (the "!" is Marx's). Who determines "his ability" and "his needs"? ... therein lie the seeds to tragedy. At least some of the members will be too self-seeking. This group, possibly a minority initially, determines the outcome of the Marxian game. As the more altruistically minded members see their selfish brethren prosper they are corrupted into abandoning their high ideals – to save their families if nothing else.

Marx of course never envisaged the principle of 'to each according to their needs' being implemented in conditions of scarcity, but only 'when all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly'. Hardin's parable is completely unhistorical. Wherever commons existed there were also rules governing their use (in the form of traditions or arrangements for decision-making in common) which precluded such over-grazing and other threats to the sustainability of the

system. The commons came to an end in England through the ruling class using its control of the state to abolish them, as a means of consolidating landed property and driving the rural poor off the land and into the factories.

Hardin's parable describes not the failure of common ownership but what happens under capitalism to those natural resources which have not yet been taken into private ownership, such as the oceans. Here capitalist firms engaged in fishing for profit all have free access to a particular fishing area. Motivated by short-term considerations – their own profit – it is in the interest of each of them to behave in the way herdsmen do in Hardin's parable and the result is indeed overfishing and depletion of stocks. But this is the result, not of property rights not existing over natural resources, but of an economic system where production is organized by separate, competing profit-seeking enterprises. Hardin's parable would more accurately have been called 'The tragedy of the commons under capitalism'.

As an argument against socialism, the paradox has no validity whatsoever. It assumes not the complete absence of property rights over productive resources generally, but only an absence of such rights over one particular resource (grazing land) while the others (the cattle, produce and so on) are privately owned. It also assumes that their owners are motivated to maximise their short-term economic gain. In other words, the behaviour of those making decisions about production under capitalism is transposed into a quite different historical context.

In socialism, where there will indeed be no property rights over land, the sea or any other natural resource, there would be no property rights over instruments of production either. The cattle as well as the land would be commonly owned. In these circumstances those responsible for looking after the cattle would not be under any pressure to behave in the way Hardin presumes. They would merely be carrying out a particular function on behalf of the community which, in the rules it would draw up for the use of grazing land, would obviously take steps to avoid overgrazing.

4. The waste of capitalism

Capitalism results in enormous waste, damage and destruction of both human and material resources. We look first at war and preparation for war, and then at other sources of waste in capitalism such as its technology and transport.

War

War, preparation for war, and the whole set of activities and organizations that make up the war industry together constitute an enormous waste of human energies and environmental resources. War is not just the continuation of economic competition by other means, but a source of profit for some capitalists. The budgets of individual nation states include large proportions of money allocated to 'defence', a sanitized term meaning to make war on the people and property of other nations or groups. The working class – which means the vast majority of people – in every nation have no quarrel with other members of the global working class, but still they elect governments that pursue costly and deadly policies of 'defence'.

Like everything else in the capitalist world, 'defence' spending shows inequalities. North America has about 43% of the global military budget, but only just over 5% of the world's population. Of course that is not to imply that everything would be fine if 5% of the world's population spent only 5% of their money trying (and often succeeding) to kill each other. Leaders of the 'poor' nations don't want to reduce, let alone stop, their spending on 'defence' – they usually want to spend more, especially if they get a cut of the profits, which they often do.

The consequences of war for the natural and material environment are catastrophic. The Vietnam war provides one of the most tragic recent examples:

The Report of the UN Commission on Vietnam pointed out that chemical warfare had created a large number of "blank zones" in the countryside. The US armed forces had engaged in large-scale defoliation because the thick foliage helps the guerrillas to hide and also obstructs the US aircraft landing... By 1969 more than 5 million acres of forests and fields had been sprayed with herbicides... against forest vegetation and... against other food crops. The ruinous impact of these chemicals on the productive abilities of the soil was incalculable (D. R. Sardesi, *Vietnam: Trials and Tribulations of a Nation*, 1988, p. 139).

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as causing death and injury to many people, have had disastrous consequences for the environment. Being more urbanized than Vietnam, Iraq's main sufferings have had a different emphasis. As a result of extensive bombing, its infrastructure has almost entirely collapsed since Saddam's overthrow. People live in crumbling tenements where the electricity goes out for hours a day, leaving them in suffocating heat. Water supplies come and go with no reliability.

The war industry wastes vast resources and inflicts much damage on the environment. On a world scale hundreds of millions of people are involved – as members of armed forces, makers and sellers of weapons and other equipment and facilities, spies, counter-spies, war planners and correspondents, scientists, researchers, etc. Wars, large and small, result in the destruction of means of production: factories, industrial equipment, buildings, railways, roads, bridges. The vast tracts of land required for military training and weapons testing is a resource not available for productive purposes.

Other waste

The market responds to money, not need. Capitalists look for opportunities for profitable 'production' – if they can find such opportunities in wasteful activities then they go for them. The unspoken thought is: don't make things to last – make them shoddily, but package them attractively and expensively so that customers can more easily be persuaded to buy new versions. Encourage the fashion industry so that serviceable and wearable items get 'out of date' quickly and replacements can be promoted, preferably as 'must have' necessities.

Much of capitalist employment wastes the time and energies of workers doing it, travelling to do it, and the construction and maintenance of buildings and facilities in which and with which to do it. Banking, insurance, financial services and advertising are some of the most frequently quoted examples, but there are many others. Much capitalist transport is extremely wasteful and inefficient. Organic food is flown to Europe from Africa. Grain is shipped from one side of the world to the other, passing freighters which are transporting an identical cargo for a different market in the other direction.

The unemployed are another category of people who are wasted in capitalist society. They represent the whole spectrum of human skills forced into idleness while the world's deprived majority could benefit from their efforts if the labour market did not stand in the way. Also wasted are the people employed in, and the resources devoted to, the unemployment industry. Job centres and their staffs, teachers and students on courses designed to teach the latter how to successfully compete for job opportunities when the odds are heavily loaded against them, are also a big waste.

It is not just in India and China that people scavenge in rubbish tips to try to get a living. In the US too, people who cannot get regular jobs are sometimes forced to rummage around garbage to find small items they can sell. In a society that loves success, and wishes not to add insult to the injury of failures, these people are known as 'alley entrepreneurs', which sounds much better than 'scavengers'.

5. Earth Summits – a record of failure

In the 1960s environmental issues were climbing up the political agenda in Western countries, thanks largely to increasing awareness of research showing worsening environmental conditions. On an April day in 1970 the first Earth Day was held in New York. An estimated 200,000 took part to demonstrate their concern about environmental issues. Politicians and professional environmentalists played a minor role in what many people saw as a popular-based celebration. The heavier stuff was to come not much later.

In 1972 a conference took place in Stockholm which discussed two groups of environmental issues. The first group was social and economic dimensions: sustainable development, combating poverty, changing consumption patterns, health, etc. The second group was issues of conservation and management of resources for development: protection of the atmosphere, deforestation, biological diversity, protection of oceans, seas and freshwater, managing toxic chemicals, hazardous and radioactive wastes.

There followed various conferences, usually resulting in declarations or agreements on a limited scale. An example is the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1987 between Canada, Mexico and the US. But as John Bellamy Foster has pointed out ‘... the primary purpose... was to promote accumulation, not ecological sustainability’ (The Vulnerable Planet, 1994, p. 132).

Rio

The first big event to be billed at the time and subsequently as an Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Officially it was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Around 175 nations were represented, over 100 heads of state and government were there, as were 1500 accredited non-government organisation representatives and 7,000 journalists.

The official report of the Rio Summit is a lengthy document, presented as a statement of achievements and failures. The achievements were numerous and minor, the failures more briefly described and major. Apparently there was general agreement to strike a ‘global bargain’: real commitment over greenhouse gases, forests and sustainable development. But no such agreement was actually struck. Although some people were doing some good things about protecting some of the environment, the theme of failure was more evident than that of success. In the words of Stanley Johnson, ‘As far as the protection of forests is concerned, Rio was an almost unmitigated disaster’ (The Earth Summit, 1993, p. 5).

At all Earth Summits and gatherings at lower altitudes there is a marked disparity between rhetoric and reality. A good example is a speech by Maurice Strong, a Canadian business executive who has played a prominent part in such events over the years:

‘The rich must take the lead in bringing their development under control, reducing substantially their impacts on the environment, leaving environmental “space” for developing countries to grow... If the agreements reached here do not serve the common interests of the entire human family, if they are devoid of the money and commitments required to implement them, if the world lapses back to “business as usual”, we will have missed a historic opportunity, one which may not recur in our times, if ever.’ The assembled delegates listened to those words sombrely, applauded them enthusiastically, and then proceeded to ignore them almost entirely. In the end the Summit’s accomplishments were pitifully few (quoted by and commented on by Mark Hertsgaard, *Earth Odyssey*, 1998, p.263).

Kyoto

In 1994 President Clinton pledged that the US would curtail its greenhouse gas emissions to their 1990 level by 2000. It didn't happen. In 1995 environmental leaders from about 120 nations met in Berlin for the first Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The second conference was in Geneva in 1996.

The next Earth Summit was in Kyoto in 1997. Representatives from more than 150 nations signed the Kyoto Protocol, created to put the Framework Convention into action. It was designed to be the first legally binding treaty aimed at cutting worldwide emissions of the main greenhouse gases. However the protocol has not yet been ratified by the one country responsible for nearly a quarter of global carbon dioxide emissions: the United States. In 1997, before the protocol was even finalised, the US senate voted unanimously to oppose ratification. While Vice President Gore symbolically signed the protocol in 1998, it has never been submitted to the legislature for ratification. President Bush, realising that ratifying would cost the US more than other countries and so undermine its competitiveness, stopped any pussy-footing about on the issue:

"I made the decision . . . that the Kyoto Treaty didn't suit our needs. In other words, the Kyoto treaty would have wrecked our economy, if I can be blunt . . . I walked away from Kyoto because it would damage America's economy, you bet. It would have destroyed our economy. It was a lousy deal for the American economy" (Interview with Sir Trevor McDonald, ITV, 4 July 2005 ..

The protocol specified an overall cut from 1990 emission levels of 5.2 percent by 2012. The EU member states agreed to make an 8 percent reduction. The UK target is 12.5 percent, which is proving to be more symbolic than realistic. Mayer Hillman offers a suitably pessimistic assessment of the situation:

...it is unlikely that the protocol will achieve its aims, let alone lead the way to future treaties... Not having the world's biggest polluter on board undermines the authority and effectiveness of the protocol... Rather than being a symbol of the determination of the world to tackle climate change, it now appears as a symbol of precisely the opposite, of the short-term (perceived) economic interests of a few countries taking priority over the future of the whole world. (How We Can Save the Planet, 2004, p.23).

Hillman is not alone in being negative about Kyoto. Others could be quoted, for instance Simon Upton (writing before enough countries had ratified it to make it binding):

Notwithstanding the commitment of vast diplomatic resources, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and its (thus far unratified) protocol failed to dent the rising tide of greenhouse gases. Similarly, notwithstanding the Biodiversity Convention, forest destruction continues apace in many parts of the world (in *Survival for a Small Planet*, ed. Tom Bigg, 2004, p. 92).

Others have drawn attention to the selfishness of national representatives of capital. Countries are 'resistant to the idea of paying large sums to other countries for a global good' (J. Kerr, *Global Emissions Trading*, p. 2).

The self-styled sceptical environmentalist, Lomborg, has a different take on Kyoto: 'The clear message is that without global trading, Kyoto is actually a net detriment to the world... global warming is not anywhere near the most important problem facing the world. What matters is making the developing countries rich and giving the citizens of developed countries even greater

opportunities' (2001:203).

Of course, when Lomborg writes of 'rich' and 'greater opportunities' he has in mind the growth of capitalism. He is right not to make global warming, or even environmental problems as a whole, our only concern. But he is wrong to imply that it is the growth of capitalism that matters. What does matter is to promote a productive relationship between human society and nature, a relationship that is being damaged rather than helped by the continuation and growth of capitalism.

The Stern report

Climate change presents a unique challenge to economics; it is the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen... Our actions over the coming decades could create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity, later in this century and in the next, on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century.

This devastating description of one of the consequences of capitalism comes from a pillar of the establishment, Sir Nicholas Stern, in his report to the British government in October 2006 on the Economics of Climate Change.

The failure in question is that the spontaneous operation of the market has resulted in the release of so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that it has caused the average world temperature to rise and go on rising for the next 40 years or so. The market enterprises responsible – coal, oil and gas burning power stations, airlines, transport firms, cement works and so on – have only had to pay for what they have had to buy on the market. As releasing carbon dioxide costs them nothing it is not something they have had to take into account. The costs of this have been 'externalised', resulting in Stern's "greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen".

At one time even supporters of capitalism would have proposed, if not a world capitalist government, at least some world body with real powers to co-ordinate a response to global warming. Now all they can come up with – as in the Stern report – is to rely on profit-seeking 'carbon traders' to solve the problem. If that's all capitalism can offer, then we are indeed all doomed – unless that is, we establish world socialism.

6. Green reformism

Green Parties advocate changes in environmental policies but not changes in the present economic, political and social system (despite individual members who may think of themselves as revolutionaries). These parties call themselves “Green” but are not socialist.

Green Parties

‘Green’ has been used since the 1950s to indicate sympathy for environmental issues or projects. and since 1980 has been adopted by the growing number of environmental parties, the first being the German Greens. Before 1985 the British Green Party was called the Ecology Party.

In the face of extensive and increasing environmental degradation, the ecological or “Green” movement has responded with a number of proposals to mitigate, if not solve, the problem. Those who are not socialist either say nothing about abolishing capitalism or make it clear that they don’t advocate or support such a change.

Al Gore is an obvious example of an anti-socialist environmentalism. Despite his well-documented concern about the environment, he believes in ‘taking a broader view of how businesses can sustain their profitability over time’. Sometimes non-socialist environmentalists use revolutionary-sounding words like ‘systemic change’ while supporting mere reforms of the status quo. Thus Lestor Brown of the Earth Policy Institute: ‘Our only hope now is rapid systemic change – change based on market signals that tell the ecological truth...’ (Plan B: Rescuing a Planet under Stress and a Civilization in Turmoil, 2003, p. 199).

It is clear from his several books that the late Murray Bookchin was a dedicated opponent of capitalism. But he made a point of asserting that ‘the color of radicalism today is no longer red; it is green...’ (The Modern Crisis, 1986, p. 45). Bookchin was a strange mixture of the revolutionary and the reformist, but unfortunately in any mixture of the two the reformist becomes dominant and the revolutionary recessive (‘Join our reform campaign today; tomorrow we start the revolution’).

Bookchin wrote eloquently of the substitution of economy for society, the ascendancy of the buyer–seller relationship, and the networks of mutual aid and reciprocity that capitalism has destroyed. But he put his faith in grassroots politics, ‘fertilized by the ecological, feminist, communitarian, and antiwar movements that have patently displaced the traditional workers’ movements of half a century ago.’ While it is true that the workers’ movements to which he referred contained very few revolutionaries, the same has to be said of contemporary ecological, feminist, communitarian and antiwar movements.

You don’t have to be explicitly anti-socialist in order to be effectively only “green”. You just have to concentrate on environmental problems, their extent and possible solution, and say nothing (except perhaps meaningless clichés) about the wider social, economic and political system in which the problems are embedded. Many large corporations are quite willing to debate environmental issues with green campaigners so long as final decisions about company policy remain under their control. David Korten makes no bones about pointing out that ‘the guiding principles of the Ecological Revolution are actively pro-business and pro-market, but they favour local over global businesses and markets’ (When Corporations Rule the World, 1995, p. 307).

Advertising and PR people acting on behalf of businesses large and small have recently been falling over themselves to jump on the “green” bandwagon. As James Harding has noted ‘The environment offers retailers the chance to appeal to shoppers’ values and earn themselves a slightly

thicker margin...’ (New Statesman, 29 January 2007). “Green” competition on the high street is not really about environmental responsibility at all. It’s about marketing and margins.

Pollution trading

In recent years an environmental reform that has been getting growing support is the promotion of various schemes for trading in carbon emissions, known for short as carbon trading. Al Gore explains: ‘If participants reduce their emissions balance below their target, they can sell their carbon credits on the exchange for a profit. If they fail to reduce their emissions they must buy credits from others.’

The European Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme has been running since 2005. In Heat Monbiot rightly points to the way in which the scheme was designed to benefit the big corporations:

It began by handing out carbon dioxide emissions permits, free of charge, to big European companies. By and large, those who produced the most carbon emissions were given the most permits: the polluter was paid. This handout was so generous that, in May 2006, the British Government’s consultants calculated that power firms would be making a windfall profit from the scheme of around 1 billion, while doing nothing to reduce their emissions. The Emissions Trading Scheme is a classic act of enclosure. It has seized something that should belong to all of us – the right, within the system, to produce a certain amount of carbon dioxide – and given it to the corporations.

Good Green reformist that he is, Monbiot proposes his own scheme of carbon trading. He wants to impose more austerity on the working class through bringing in electricity and fuel rationing. He thinks ‘carbon units’ rather dull as a name for these rations, so he wants to re-name them ‘icecaps’ to remind us that the aim of limiting them is to keep the planet cool:

The icecaps you are given can be traded with other people. If you reach the end of the year and find you haven’t used all your allocation, you can sell the remainder to someone else. Or if you’ve used too much, you can buy the extra icecaps you need... What this means is that the lady in the Rolls-Royce car might still be driving around, but only after she has transferred a good deal of money to people who are poorer or more abstemious than she is. Economic justice is built into the system (p. 46).

And, of course, its name is still capitalism. But it also brings out how many environmentalists have, even if unwittingly, lined up with open supporters of the capitalist system, who always want to impose austerity on the working class,

7. Socialism – an inconvenient question?

“Red-and-green” claimants

Red as the colour of (socialist) revolution dates back at least as far as the early 19th century. Green as the colour of environmental concern and activity is more recent. But like the word ‘socialism’, ‘red’ has been used to mean many shades of thought from reformist to revolutionary. ‘Green’ has been used to denote ecological thinking from a purely observational perspective to a radical ‘get-to-the-root-of-it’ perspective with all shades of ‘Green’ naivety in between. To speak of being both red and green can be therefore doubly confusing. Which is why, not being colour fetishists, socialists don’t make a big thing out of claims to be ‘red and green’.

Marx, unquestionably a red in ideas if not in name, never laid claim to being “red and green”, even though he was well aware that capitalism harmed nature as well as the working class. Some of the numerous writers on Marx and Marxism disagree on what might be called his green credentials. The title of Paul Burkett’s (1999) book, *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective*, makes it clear where Marx stood on the issue. Burkett defends Marx against critics who claim that he favoured human domination over nature and that he downgraded the contribution of nature to production. Burkett, in paraphrasing Marx, ‘insists that production as both a social and a natural process is shaped and constrained by natural conditions, including, of course, the natural condition of human bodily existence’ (p. 1).

Burkett also agrees with Marx that capitalist production exploits both labour and nature: ‘Marx’s perspective thus sheds light on capitalism’s historically unprecedented tendencies toward biospheric crisis’ (p. 11).

The label ‘ecosocialist’ (sometimes called ‘ecological Marxism’) implies having a foot in both ‘red’ and ‘green’ camps. David Pepper’s book, *Ecosocialism*, quotes approvingly from Socialist Party literature and tapes, and has the subtitle *From deep ecology to social justice*. Unfortunately he appears to accept Tony Benn’s vague and confusing definition of socialism as ‘equity, democracy, accountability, internationalism and morality’ (p. 2).

Bahro is a rather dubious ‘red-and-green’. One of his books is *From Red to Green* (1984) but soon after writing it he left the Green Party in Germany, of which he had been a leading but controversial member. Bahro does not call himself a socialist and rejects talking about the common ownership of the means of production. But he seems to be confusing common ownership with state ownership as he also says, as we do, that ‘Human appropriation of the earth as a whole has to happen, but I see this as a process of the reunification of people with their means of production and with the earth. The earth can belong to no one’ (p 236).

Two other ‘red-and-green’ writers also show some understanding that capitalism is the problem. Joe Weston believes that ‘... it is time that greens accepted that it is capitalism rather than industrialism per se which is at the heart of the problems they address’ (*Red and Green*, 1986, p. 4). James O’Connor says,

... we need “socialism” at least to make the social relations of production transparent, to end the rule of the market and commodity fetishism, and to end the exploitation of human beings by other human beings; we need “ecology” at least to make the social productive forces transparent, to end the degradation and destruction of the Earth (*Natural Causes, Essays in Ecological Marxism*, 1998, p. 277).

The Socialist Party's position

Our position on socialism in relation to the environment may be outlined as follows.

Production for needs

A socialist society requires that the productive system as a whole should meet the needs of its members and be sustainable for the rest of nature. In other words, what humans take from nature, the amount and pace at which they do so, the way they use those materials and dispose of them after use, should all be done so as to leave nature to go on supplying and reabsorbing those materials after use.

In the long run this implies stable or only slowly rising consumption and production levels, though it does not rule out carefully planned initial rapid growth over a period to reach a level at which consumption and production could then level off. Production would be geared simply to meeting current needs and to replacing and repairing the stock of means of production (materials and instruments) required for this.

The only rationale for accumulating means of production would be to be in a position to satisfy all reasonable consumption needs, not as at present to manufacture 'wants' for marketing and profits. Once achieved then accumulation, or the further expansion of the stock of means of production, could stop and production levels be stabilized. The proportion of people's time devoted to 'production' would be correspondingly reduced and stabilized, leaving them free to indulge in whatever pursuits they fancied.

So if human society is to be able to organize its production and other activities in an ecologically acceptable way then it must abolish the capitalist social, economic and political system of profit accumulation and replace it with a system which gears production to the direct satisfaction of needs.

To produce the things that people need in an ecologically acceptable way presupposes that society as a whole must be in a position to control production and direct its purposes. This cannot be done in a society where the means of production are owned and controlled by a privileged few or where production is governed by the operation of blind economic laws which impose their own priorities. Production for needs, therefore, demands an end both to minority control over the means of production and to production for the market.

Production for needs requires that control over the means of production (nature, materials, instruments of production) should be available to all. Everyone must stand equally with all others in relation to the means of production. Also, production for needs demands the end of buying and selling; the end of the market. It means that goods are produced, and services made available, simply for their use-value, that is, capacity to satisfy human need.

Production for the market is an expression of the fact that the means of production and therefore the products are owned not by all the members of a society in common but by individuals or groups such as corporations. Exchange would completely disappear in a society where there were no property rights over the means of production.

Democracy and common ownership

Production for needs can take place only on the basis of common ownership. With common ownership, what is produced is no longer the property of some individual or group, which has to be purchased before it can be used or kept, but becomes directly available for people to take in accordance with their reasonable needs.

We say that it is common ownership which provides the framework for the development of a balanced relationship between human society and the rest of nature. We are talking about the common ownership of all the Earth's natural and manufactured resources by the whole of humanity. We are talking about a world socialist society which would recreate, on a world scale and on the basis of today's technological and other knowledge, the communistic social relations of freedom, equality and community which many humans have aspired to since the coming of property society.

Humanity is now in a position, and has been for some time, to supply, in an ecologically acceptable way the needs of all its members. The means of production and the knowledge at its disposal are more than sufficient to enable this to be done. The problem is that the dominant ideas are those of capitalism. What is lacking is the appropriate social framework: understanding the need for the common ownership of the Earth's natural and manufactured resources.

Common ownership on a world scale means that there will be no property or territorial rights over any part of the globe or over any of the instruments of production created by human activity. The Earth and its natural and material resources will not belong to anyone. They would simply be there to be used in accordance with democratically-decided rules and procedures.

The precise details of the decision-making arrangements of a world socialist society cannot be laid down today. But it is possible to envisage the local community being the basic unit of such arrangements. People could elect a local council to co-ordinate and administer local affairs. Delegates could be sent to regional councils to decide matters concerning a wider area, and so on. Possibly a world council would be the best way to deal with matters on a world scale (for instance, the supply of scarce minerals, the protection of the biosphere, the use of the oceans, and space research).

On the basis of common ownership and democratic control, the world-wide network of productive and administrative units can be geared to meeting human needs. This need not involve the organisation of a bureaucratic world planning authority. Instead we could set up production and distribution mechanisms at different levels to respond flexibly to demands communicated to them.

Free access

Gearing production to meeting needs means making arrangements for individuals and groups to have free access to what they need. Socialism not being a society in which goods and services are produced for sale, people would not have to buy what they needed. They would be able to decide for themselves in a socially responsible way what their needs were and then take from the stock of products set aside for individual or group consumption. In the case of services, advance booking, priority according to need, or 'first come, first served' arrangements could apply.

Information to the network of productive units as to what to produce would thus come from what people actually chose to take or order from distribution stores under conditions of free access. This would essentially be a system of stock control in the first instance at local community level. Needs

would be communicated to the productive network as demands for given amounts and types of specified products, materials and services. This information would then be communicated throughout the system, where necessary to other regions or to the world level.

Goods (services as well as material things) would be produced and distributed as useful items intended to satisfy some human need. Because they were no longer being produced and offered for sale on the market, they would not have a price. Instead, estimates of what updated information suggested was likely to be needed over a given period would be expressed as quantities of specified products, materials and human time, not money.

There would be no need for any universal unit of account to measure need, supply or demand. Other more important factors than cost could be taken into account in making choices about which materials and productive methods to use or what services to supply. Instead of minimizing the cost of production being the only criterion, other factors such as the health, comfort and enjoyment of those doing the work, the protection of the environment and a sustainable ecological system could be given the prominent place they deserve.

Protecting the environment

In a society oriented to meeting needs the concept of profits would be meaningless, while the imperative to 'growth' would disappear. Instead, after an initial period of increase in useful production to provide the whole world's population with basic amenities, production can be expected to stabilize at a level sufficient to provide for people's current needs and the future viability of their society. A sustainable relationship with the rest of nature could be achieved. Needs on a world scale could be in balance with the capacity of the biosphere to renew itself after supplying them.

As the only life-form that can act in a way conscious of the wider impact it can have on other species and on the planet as a whole, humans have the potential to act as planet's 'brain', consciously regulating its function in the interest of present and future generations. But before we can hope to play this role we must first integrate our own activities into a sustainable natural cycle on a planetary scale. This we can do only within the framework of a world socialist society in which the Earth and all its natural and material resources have become the common heritage of all humanity.

Conclusion

We humans are part of nature, not external to it. We are one with nature; we must nurture it if it is to sustain us. As a species we are the most complex and developed form of life on Earth. We are on a long journey that is sometimes perilous, often difficult and challenging.

Socialists work for a revolution in society from world capitalism to world socialism. The revolution we want is a social revolution that will change the basis of society from the present monopoly of productive resources by rich individuals, corporations and states into one where the Earth and its resources belong to none but will have become the common heritage of all humanity. This revolution can only be carried out democratically by the majority class in society, those forced to work for a wage or a salary in order to get a living, with a view to freeing themselves from exploitation for profit and from the restrictions and problems that the capitalist profit system imposes on them. At the same time socialists understand that such a revolution has also to achieve a sustainable relationship between human society and the rest of nature.

We ourselves are members of the world-wide working class and as members also of the Socialist

Party and of the World Socialist Movement urge others to join us so that together we can be architects of the future rather than victims of the present.

This brings us back to the title of this pamphlet: An Inconvenient Question? A title used as a provocative invitation to join us to be a part of the process to help create that respectful, empowering and mutually beneficial world we call socialism.